

## 18 Verna's Funeral

The tribe intended a service for Verna soon after her death, but a younger leadership took over and didn't want any ceremony honoring Caucasians. Thereafter, the long, bitter fight over building a casino pushed all else aside.

Thirty! or so years later at the canyon service, Old Priest, looking a frail 100 in a new checked flannel shirt from Sears, presides. He knows most of the tribal chants. Those who know all of them depend on tips at the casino, so don't ask to be released. He speaks in spurts, with labored breathing and muttered chants in between. William Sparklehorse introduces him, explaining, "We're here. Why not sooner? Well, one thing and another."

*The white buffalo is with us each day as Verna is with us.*

*The time of the lone wolf is finished.*

*We are those we waited for.*

*We are sacred as Verna in the blood of the world.*

*The Great Spirit makes the wind and the sun and the pretty baby in the blanket.*

*And the blanket with its tribal symbols.*

*He guides the potter's hand and blows into the kiln.*

*Come to him as son and daughter and you will speak to our tribe's Verna, who is with him forever. Her name is whispered by the breeze which never stops.*

*The Great Spirit loves you as he loves the wind the buffalo races.*

The Christian side of the service is handled by Dr Harold Earnshaw, who has just led a busload of other Episcopal seniors, the "High Church Sharks," to the casino.

He is given a yellowed program from a long-ago dinner celebrating the tribal hospital's senior staff to cull some biographical facts about Verna.

His theme proves an immense hit with his Indian audience, most of whom have no religion of either type. "If, like Verna, you walk the road of lifetime service, with its dust and ruts and potholes, and all the hazards of this world, then you have strapped on the sandals of Jesus Christ.

"And when you do that, you can go anywhere at any time, for you will never truly be afraid again."

Jeanette Redfeather Osgood, of Osgood's Hardware had prepared food for everyone. She complimented Dr Earnshaw, adding that when she left the reservation she stopped being afraid.

One old man later dictated just the phrase 'Sandals of Jesus Christ' to his granddaughter, who wrote it in orange crayon on a brown paper bag.

He placed it atop the stack of family photographs, retrieving it periodically to gaze at the words, especially when feeling weak and sick.

Having arranged flattened cardboard boxes over the windows so a beam of light strikes the script, making it glow, he watches *Jeopardy* afternoons on his huge can of a dim RCA.

Seated on the floor and wrapped in blankets, "Sandals of Jesus Christ," he nods to Alex Trebeck.

Dr Bert Windsong had felt that someone should attend from Casino Finance, so dispatched Louis Bravest Wolf, recently graduated from Tufts University as L. B. Wolf.

-What did Old Priest say?

-He never said.

-Oh come on now! He must've said something.

-Same ole moonshit. Tonto and the conversing rocks.

-Give me more of a hint. Or this office won't give you a lunch voucher, promised or not.

-A is A except when it's B. Then it's C.

-Creative Indian algebra?

-C being for Christian, since he stirs in some baba-babaloo from the New Testament also. From the sleaze-o God Is Love gang, I suspect. Hell, both streams are polluted, so what's the difference?

-I see. And the actual clergyman they got?

-Worse.

-Wow! Tufts really turning out hard-edged secularists!

-You got that straight. It's the difference between God with serial farting, or the satisfaction of taking a good shit.

-Am I to look forward to similar chunks of sunshine from you during your employment here?

-Hey I got one! Food fabulous! That hardware lady from town? Redfeather something? Colleague of my mother's anyway. Twisted Folklore Group. Excuse me, Bible Study. Better she should stick to cooking. There she's a fuckin saint!

-Can't stop, can you? At any tiresome rate, our food or...?

-Both. Best of all possible worlds.

-God I miss our cooking! But it wouldn't go in the casino.

-The world's a casino. That's why it's so full of shit!

-Your favorite word, I know, but we deal with money here.